



Proverbs chapter 2:10-4:27

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 12th September 2021 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Psalm 1:1-6

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

We are in the book of Proverbs, the 20th book of the Bible, largely written by king Solomon under the guidance of the Holy Spirit some 3000 years ago. And despite the length of time that has passed, it is as relevant to our lives today as it was then - for it's subject is wisdom.

And as quoted last week, "the simple truth is that if people followed the advice of Proverbs, many of their problems would be reduced dramatically".

So it's important to note that is the application, and not simply reading or memorising of Proverbs that will help you. Proverbs will do you no good as a fridge magnet, keychain or poster, if it doesn't change your life, if it doesn't change your heart. Therefore, we'll continue to look at not only what it says, but how that should change us - how indeed, we can apply it to our lives.

Last week we got as far as chapter 2:9, and tonight we'll finish not only that chapter, but chapters 3 and 4 as well. So to give a preview of what's in tonight's study, let's look at the basic structure of these 3 chapters...

Overview of chapter two

Overall, the second chapter speaks of the value of wisdom, but zoom in a little and there are two parts to it, the second of which we'll study this evening:

- v1-9 - The if and when of wisdom
- v10-22 - The effect of wisdom

Overview of chapter three

As we move into chapter 3, we'll see three sections we can divide it into

- Guidance for the young (v1-12)
- The value of wisdom (v13-18)
- Choose wisdom! (v19-35)

Overview of chapter four

Chapter 4, which we'll conclude with this evening, can be summarised or broken down into 2 parts:

- Wisdom is the principal thing (v1-9)
- Learn wisdom, and apply it (v10-27)

Now if you're scribbling away to make notes - great! But also, rest assured you can find these chapter overviews, along with full notes, available on our web site each week with the audio and video recordings.

Chapter two

So picking up in chapter 2 and verse 10, we see the effect of wisdom:

Proverbs 2:10-11

When wisdom enters your heart,
And knowledge is pleasant to your soul,
Discretion will preserve you;
Understanding will keep you,

That is, there is huge reward in wisdom. But note the choice of words here; WHEN wisdom enters your heart. Not before. It needs to happen for it to take effect. But also... When wisdom enters your HEART. Not your head. It has to make that 9-inch drop.

And knowledge is pleasant to your soul. Not your intellect. Your soul.

In those conditions, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you.

Proverbs 2:12-15

To deliver you from the way of evil,
From the man who speaks perverse things,
From those who leave the paths of uprightness
To walk in the ways of darkness;
Who rejoice in doing evil,
And delight in the perversity of the wicked;
Whose ways are crooked,
And who are devious in their paths;

Isn't that good news?! That wisdom will deliver us from the evil man. From those that would lead us into sin, into stupidity. And who would have us lead a life devoid of love for our neighbour.

But let me be clear. It is not just men that are evil; there are evil women too. And just as we read in the next verse about the immoral woman, there are immoral men too. And you need to watch out for them in your life, regardless of which way round. Evil and immoral actions come in both blue and pink. So be on your guard. But Solomon, as we'll see, uses one or the other to help make it relatable - for in the end, this will apply to specific people you know.

And we read that the effect of wisdom continues...

Proverbs 2:16-17

To deliver you from the immoral woman,
From the seductress who flatters with her words,
Who forsakes the companion of her youth,
And forgets the covenant of her God.

We like compliments, right? And there's nothing wrong in them. But so interested are we in what people think of us, that we can easily be seduced by flattery - even when it comes from someone who has left their spouse, and walked away from the Lord.

Finnis Dake notes that the implication here is of a woman of a foreign religion that used prostitution to make converts. Sounds outrageous, right? Not really. Today satan will use the same tactic on you. If you are not married, listen up - satan will gladly bring a non-Christian girl or guy into your life, and use that to pull you away from the Lord. That's the danger of the non-Christian girlfriend or boyfriend. I have yet to see that work out well once.

But take note if you are married - none of this is a unique challenge of singleness - for satan would love to destroy your marriage, and his first step may well be a flattering word from someone in the office, or another parent at the school gates.

Wisdom will protect you from a problem before it even starts. And the stakes are high...

Proverbs 2:18-19

For her house leads down to death,
And her paths to the dead;
None who go to her return,
Nor do they regain the paths of life—

You see, a flattering word can turn life very sour. Proverbs chapters 5-7 deal with this much more, so we'll dig into those next week. But for now I'll share just one comment by Jon Courson, who says "When you are involved in a relationship with a strange woman, something is lost. Yes, God will forgive. But the damage is irreparable. The scars will remain."

But if you let wisdom take hold of you, you can expect better. We read...

Proverbs 2:20

So you may walk in the way of goodness,
And keep to the paths of righteousness.

You and I need to keep to the paths of righteousness. And we need to be very careful about the voices we let guide us, for the way is narrow.

Consider this; if I were to blindfold you and ask you to walk along a raised plank of wood, how carefully would you listen to my instructions?! We actually played this game often at Youth Club - and they were the loudest evenings, for the opposing team always made a ton of noise to put the player off, so they didn't know who was shouting and, as a result, would sometimes listen to the wrong instruction. The best hope for the person walking, was to listen for a voice they recognised. And likewise, we need to listen to God's voice, to His wisdom. But how will you know God's voice if you never spend any time with Him?

Driving while praying is good. Maybe really important depending on how you drive. And there's nothing wrong with it. But that can't be the only time you pray.

Reading the Bible with the TV on is not wrong. But are you really giving it your full attention? Or are the other voices so loud it's drowning out the One you need to listen to?

We read...

Proverbs 2:21-22

For the upright will dwell in the land,
And the blameless will remain in it;
But the wicked will be cut off from the earth,
And the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.

The end of these two paths couldn't be more different. And if you've read ahead - and I'm referring to Revelation - you know it doesn't end well for the wicked.

Chapter three

Now, as we go through these next 2 chapters, note how many times instruction requires action, for if you want the benefits of wisdom, you have to apply it. I'll highlight these actions both on screen and in the notes that will be available with the recording, even if I don't mention each one as we study through chapters 3 and 4. We read in verse 1:

Proverbs 3:1

My son, **do not** forget my law,
But **let** your heart keep my commands;

This isn't about submitting to duty. Solomon didn't write; let your head keep my commandments. But rather, your heart - just as David had done before:

Psalm 119:11

Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You.

And just as Ezra would later do:

Ezra 7:10

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Indeed, we read in chapter 14 of John's gospel:

John 14:23-24

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

What was Jesus question to Peter after he had denied him? It wasn't "what is your duty?". It was "do you love me?"

That's how to keep God's commandments - by loving Him. By why keep them? We read...

Proverbs 3:2

For length of days and long life
And peace they will add to you.

That is, God's commandments are not for your imprisonment, but for your protection. We read in 1st John:

1 John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

And when you look at it, you'll find all sorts of blessings that come from keeping God's commandments. From your health, to peace. The alternative being the addictions, STDs, sleeplessness, increased anxiety, stress and such that come from being a fool.

Therefore...

Proverbs 3:3-4

Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart,
And so find favour and high esteem
In the sight of God and man.

Our ultimate example of course being Jesus - who we read in John's gospel, was full of grace and truth. That is, both grace AND truth.

Solomon continues...

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.

Great verses. But we can't simply make them a fridge magnet, bookmark or Facebook post. Instead, we need to make sure familiarity doesn't get in the way of what is being said.

Trust - not in what I can see, or what I know, but in WHOM I know. For God has never failed me yet.

In the Lord - this is the God who made everything. EVERYTHING! Seriously, why is there any worry or concern? In terms of my own worry - I need to remember who God is!

With all your heart - that is; all in. But this isn't with all your head. This isn't about how I might look at the situation from a factual perspective. This is the heart - every emotion, every hurt, every care, every concern - all my feelings are what I need to trust to the Lord. ALL of them.

And lean not on your own understanding. I might not understand fully how I've ended up here, or where everything is going. But everything has to be submitted to Jesus, recognising that I can't hope to understand it all on my own.

In all your ways acknowledge Him. This is key - and there's a promise attached to this... All my ways... every conversation, every word, every thought. I need to pray about everything, as my need is not for God to respond immediately, but to come into His presence regularly.

And He shall direct your paths. That's the promise! And what a promise it is! But it is reliant on those first steps. It doesn't say God will direct your paths, so trust him. No, no. It's the other way round.

If you want, you can take matters into your own hands like Abraham did. Or you can trust and obey in the midst of your trial, just as Joseph did.

"Oh, but this trial is too hard." Really? Is it really worse than what Job faced? For even he said of God "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

Proverbs 3:7

Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.

Again, not fear in the sense of cowering in the corner, but that of reverence - knowing who God is, and acting accordingly. And as we read in 1 Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 5:22

Abstain from every form of evil.

For...

Proverbs 3:8

It will be health to your flesh,
And strength to your bones.

Contrast with the anxiety that comes from the fear of man!

The next instruction can be hard to swallow, but again comes with promise:

Proverbs 3:9-10

Honour the LORD with your possessions,
And with the first-fruits of all your increase;
So your barns will be filled with plenty,
And your vats will overflow with new wine.

J Vernon McGee said:

Don't tell me you are totally committed to the Lord until your pocketbook is committed too. The Lord gave you everything. Some folk may say, "I have worked hard. I earned this." But who gave you the health to work? Who gave you the work to do? Who made it possible for you to make money? My friend, God did all that for you. Acknowledge Him. That is the evidence of total commitment.

J Vernon McGee

And Jon Courson notes, "the single time in all of Scripture that God asks to be put to the test is with regard to finances" - referring to Malachi 3:10

But if God has your heart, I believe your finances will follow. As will your time.

Feeling convicted? Feeling corrected? Don't be alarmed if you are, for we read...

Proverbs 3:11-12

My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor detest His correction;
For whom the LORD loves He corrects,
Just as a father the son in whom he delights.

I suggest making a note of 2 Timothy 3:16 and Hebrews 12:5-11 to read later on this topic, but simply put correction is to set you on the right course. And often that is early in our walk - because if so, only minor adjustments are needed later - like a ship that sets sail in the right direction - how much better!

Proverbs 3:13-14

Happy is the man who finds wisdom,
And the man who gains understanding;
For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver,
And her gain than fine gold.

Is that how much you value wisdom? Did you say yes? And did your calendar just laugh at you?! How much did you chase silver and gold this week vs wisdom and understanding?

If anyone understood silver and gold, it was Solomon:

1 Kings 10:21

All King Solomon's drinking vessels were gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Not one was silver, for this was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon.

And all of that was nothing compared to wisdom.

Proverbs 3:15

She is more precious than rubies,
And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.

That is, wisdom is more precious than everything on Amazon.co.uk put together.

Proverbs 3:16-18

Length of days is in her right hand,
In her left hand riches and honour.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,
And happy are all who retain her.

What blessings wisdom brings! But you've got to take hold of her!

Adam and Eve literally had the chance to eat of the tree of life, but instead believed a lie that questioned what God had said, and ended up falling into sin. Don't do the same!

Rather, take hold of wisdom. Take hold of God's Word, which has been written for you. It won't do you any good on your shelf.

Proverbs 3:19-20

The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;
By understanding He established the heavens;
By His knowledge the depths were broken up,
And clouds drop down the dew.

Look at the accomplishments of wisdom! That wisdom by which He founded the earth? Jesus, the Word who was with God, and was God. The Word made flesh. The very Word you can read today.

Proverbs 3:21-22

My son, let them not depart from your eyes—
Keep sound wisdom and discretion;
So they will be life to your soul
And grace to your neck.

This is your part. Do this, and then, and only then, you'll see the result...

Proverbs 3:23-24

Then you will walk safely in your way,
And your foot will not stumble.
When you lie down, you will not be afraid;
Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.

Indeed, there is no pillow as soft as a clear conscience. Does that mean there are no medical problems that cause sleeplessness? Of course not - there are many things that do disrupt our sleep. But how much sleeplessness comes not only from our own sin, but from the sin of others? This is a very real problem, and medicine or technology can only hope to mask the problem. The best hope for the world, is wise walking in the fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 3:25-26

Do not be afraid of sudden terror,
Nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes;
For the LORD will be your confidence,
And will keep your foot from being caught.

Perhaps one of the most relatable examples for us all is the bumpy flight. It's not enjoyable - but how much more secure do you feel, knowing where you're going. To live is Christ, to die is gain!

Trust me in this - the Lord WILL be your confidence.

Don't place your confidence in anyone or anything else.

Proverbs 3:27-28

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,
When it is in the power of your hand to do so.
Do not say to your neighbour,
"Go, and come back,
And tomorrow I will give it,"
When you have it with you.

Reading this, we should keep in mind the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10, noting we should treat all as our neighbour. And we should also note James 4:17...

James 4:17

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

What should we do? More. Of course, there is more need in this world than you or I can hope to meet on our own. But that shouldn't prevent us from doing what we can.

But there is also appropriate help. Here we read "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due". If we want to do someone good, that might not be material needs - even if it is what is asked for. If someone is frittering away their money, rather than feeding their family, they should fix their priorities - and it would be better to help them with that, rather than fund their problem, whatever it may be. And that may cost you time... do you have the time to counsel someone, serve someone? Does it mean you'll miss something you wanted to do right now? It might.

Proverbs 3:29

Do not devise evil against your neighbour,
For he dwells by you for safety's sake.

The Christian should never be a bad neighbour! You should never aim to disadvantage them. Don't try to keep up with the Joneses by undermining the Joneses.

Proverbs 3:30

Do not strive with a man without cause,
If he has done you no harm.

We can get easily upset, about the smallest, most ridiculous things. By why? Could someone have acted better? Could someone have said something more kindly? Sure. But that's not licence for you to become cantankerous, that is; bad-tempered, argumentative, and uncooperative.

Proverbs 3:31-32

Do not envy the oppressor,
And choose none of his ways;
For the perverse person is an abomination to the LORD,
But His secret counsel is with the upright.

There are at least 20 things in the book of Proverbs that are described as an abomination to the Lord. Don't do or be any of them! God will speak to those who love Him.

As we close this chapter, and these warnings to choose wisdom, Solomon compares the outcome again of the choices we have:

Proverbs 3:33-35

The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked,
But He blesses the home of the just.
Surely He scorns the scornful,
But gives grace to the humble.
The wise shall inherit glory,
But shame shall be the legacy of fools.

Do you want a happy home? Then listen to verse 31 and don't envy those that oppress, don't follow their ways. Don't be an angry, unkind, aggressive person. But rather, pursue God. Follow His commandments. then you can expect healthier home life. That doesn't mean just church on a Sunday, but pursue with your whole life!

Do you want glory? Then be wise and follow what we read in elsewhere in scripture:

James 4:10

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

1 Peter 5:6a

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time...

Chapter four

Now, in our final chapter this evening, we will see, in case there is any doubt, how wisdom is the principal thing - followed by a call to learn, and apply it. We read...

Proverbs 4:1-2

Hear, my children, the instruction of a father,
And give attention to know understanding;
For I give you good doctrine:
Do not forsake my law.

And we need to read this in the context of a good father - one that loves, helps and leads by example - giving good doctrine.

Proverbs 4:3-4

When I was my father's son,
Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother,
He also taught me, and said to me:
" Let your heart retain my words;
Keep my commands, and live.

Fathers, how often and how much do you teach your children? I ask this because you are not to outsource your responsibility to Sunday school teachers - they are there to supplement what is taught in the home. It seems to me that mum's have the reputation for being the one's that teach their kids about the Bible - that's a great reputation, but father's we must not fail to teach our children about the Lord. I have a lot to learn about this in the coming years - but I know this: it IS my responsibility to do it.

Proverbs 4:5-6

Get wisdom! Get understanding!
Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you;
Love her, and she will keep you.

Love requires action. If you love someone, you want to find out more about them. Keep company with them. And you don't take well to others telling you to avoid them! Consider how you can keep company with wisdom, how you can learn more about wisdom. For we read...

Proverbs 4:7-8

Wisdom is the principal thing;
Therefore get wisdom.
And in all your getting, get understanding.
Exalt her, and she will promote you;
She will bring you honour, when you embrace her.

Again, not this happens when you value wisdom. When you embrace it. Not avoid it.

Proverbs 4:9

She will place on your head an ornament of grace;
A crown of glory she will deliver to you."

Do we need more encouragement? Do we need more reason? You would hope not. But Solomon now will plead with us to listen, learn, and apply what we have heard.

Proverbs 4:10

Hear, my son, and receive my sayings,
And the years of your life will be many.

Stupidity is a sure way to shorten your life. So hear. Don't just listen, but hear.

Proverbs 4:11-12

I have taught you in the way of wisdom;
I have led you in right paths.
When you walk, your steps will not be hindered,
And when you run, you will not stumble.

This is the value in father's teaching their children, and children listening to your fathers.

Proverbs 4:13-15

Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go;
Keep her, for she is your life.
Do not enter the path of the wicked,
And do not walk in the way of evil.
Avoid it, do not travel on it;
Turn away from it and pass on.

How could this be any clearer? You have to make a choice. Look at the choices you need to make in just these 3 verses! All to keep from evil, and those who love evil...

Proverbs 4:16

For they do not sleep unless they have done evil;
And their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall.

Some people are just intent on causing trouble - you only have to look at the comments section on social media to see that!

Proverbs 4:17

For they eat the bread of wickedness,
And drink the wine of violence.

In other words, they feed off other people's misery. But contrast that to how we should be, who partake in the the bread and wine of the Lord's supper.

Proverbs 4:18

But the path of the just is like the shining sun,
That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.

We know where we're going, and able to see things clearly for what they are. We know what that glorious end will be. But in stark contrast...

Proverbs 4:19

The way of the wicked is like darkness;
They do not know what makes them stumble.

So many say "I don't know why I did it". They are slaves to sin.

In today's world, you are encouraged to do what you want, to do whatever feels good - but that doesn't mean you know what you're doing! Or that it's a good idea. Later in Proverbs 16 we read...

Proverbs 16:25

There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death.

Proverbs 4:20-22

My son, give attention to my words;
Incline your ear to my sayings.
Do not let them depart from your eyes;
Keep them in the midst of your heart;
For they are life to those who find them,
And health to all their flesh.

The decisions, the choices, you make will have a huge impact on your life. So seek the wisdom to make good ones. Don't follow your heart. Lead it. We read...

Proverbs 4:23

Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the issues of life.

This is both scientifically accurate (as discovered by William Harvey some 2700 years later) and spiritually so - for our hearts are desperately wicked. Let's look at Jesus' words:

Mark 7:20-23

And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

Therefore...

Proverbs 4:24

Put away from you a deceitful mouth,
And put perverse lips far from you.

Be so very careful what you listen to. Just because it is labelled Christian doesn't mean it is good doctrine. Scriptures can be twisted.

And be careful what you say.

Proverbs 4:25-27

Let your eyes look straight ahead,
And your eyelids look right before you.
Ponder the path of your feet,
And let all your ways be established.
Do not turn to the right or the left;
Remove your foot from evil.

In other words, think about what you are doing. Recognise when make wrong steps, and remove your foot from there urgently. Apply prudence, which as CS Lewis defined:

Prudence means practical common sense, taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it.

CS Lewis

Summary

How do we summarise all this? We need wisdom! We need to be humble enough to listen to instruction, and godly enough to give it when it is our responsibility to do so.

But as always, the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. We need God's help. We need His wisdom. But thankfully, we have His Word.

Application questions

As with last Sunday, I want to leave you with some application questions to think on during the week:

- Are you valuing wisdom more than gold or silver? What does your calendar say?
- Are you honouring the Lord with your possessions, and your time?
- Father's - are you teaching your children God's Word and wisdom? (mother's too!)

Let's pray.